

QUT Digital Repository:
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



Duke, Jennifer (2009) *Inclusive Education Statement - policy analysis*.
(Unpublished)

© Copyright 2009 Jennifer Duke

This study analyses the ***Inclusive Education Statement – 2005***, Education Queensland. (Appendix 1). The *Statement* was a product of the Queensland State Government response to Federal Legislation.

The Federal *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)*, 1992 and the subsequent *Standards for Education 2005*, sought to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. Under Section 22 of the Act, it became unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a person on the grounds of the person's disability.

In 2004, just before the release of the *DDA Standards for Education*, The Hon. A.M. Bligh, Minister for Education and the Arts, presented the *Ministerial Statement on Students with Disabilities* to the Queensland Parliament. The Ministerial Statement detailed a 10-point plan arising from the Government's response to the final report of the *Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education - Students with Disabilities*.

The Government's response to Recommendation 2 of the *Taskforce* report was to establish a Ministerial Advisory Committee to

.....develop an inclusive education statement that clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of educators and the system in developing inclusive school communities.

(Queensland Government, 2004, p.3)

The resulting *Inclusive Education Statement- 2005*, **contains** the following sections –

1. A definition of inclusive education in Education Queensland
2. Education Queensland's commitment to inclusive education
3. Indicators of inclusive education (Systems, Districts, Schools, Teaching and Learning)
4. Challenges and responses regarding delivery of inclusive education

The *Inclusive Education Statement* (2005, p.1), "urges staff at all levels to sharpen their focus on equity and citizenship goals of public education". The expressed **aim** of the *Statement* (2005, p.1) is to "clarify the nature of inclusive education and its role in achieving the objectives that underpin public education in Queensland".

The **objectives** that "underpinned" public education in Queensland were informed by major reviews and initiatives including, *Queensland State Education – 2010*, the *Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS)* and the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future*. These reviews and initiatives highlighted the need for a school reform agenda that focussed on quality teaching and learning to allow students to achieve high-level outcomes and become life long learners (Education

Queensland, 2000, 2001, 2002). Achievement of these objectives allegedly relies upon a commitment to inclusion by the organisation.

The Ministerial Taskforce, in 2004, also acknowledged further state, national and global **contexts** that influenced their recommendations. These included

- national and international movement to achieve social justice at all levels of society and government
- creation of active and productive citizens in a democratic society.
- the vision of inclusive education as an important factor in achieving the *Smart State*.

(Queensland Government, 2004, p.20)

The *Inclusive Education Statement – 2005*, describes the international agenda to improve social justice and the need to build communities that “value, celebrate and respond to diversity”. Thus, developing the type of society in which we want to live. The *Statement*

The Ministerial Taskforce acknowledges the influence of *The Smart State* on Inclusive Education Reform. *The Smart State* is the Queensland Government’s vision of a State where “knowledge, creativity and innovation drive economic growth to improve prosperity and quality of life for all Queenslanders”. (Queensland Government, 2008). The means developing Queensland’s knowledge-based economy. This supports the argument that Inclusive Education has an economic and social contribution to our society. Ball suggests that education is seen widely as a crucial factor in economic competitiveness and globalization.

Though reputed to be a response to the Smart State agenda in Queensland, reaction to the various needs of the key interest groups, parents/caregivers, teachers, schools, community, industry and business members was also an outcome of *political states of play* (Fulcher, 1989). The interests of the community influenced the timing of the release of the *Statement*. Its release coincided with the passing of the DDA, *Standards for Education* by the Federal Government in 2005. The *Statement* responded to debates in the community about discrimination and equity for students with disabilities and increasing numbers of complaints to Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission by students and parents regarding education provider (Tronc, 2004; The State of South Australia, 2007).

Reflecting global, national and local “political states of play” (Fulcher, 1989), the *discourse* and choice of vocabulary within the *Statement* could be described as “inclusive” rather than “divisive”. Inclusive policy discourse, described by Fulcher, reflects a position where students are the focus, school communities are encouraged to unify and there is a clear goal for “including all children in regular schools and directs us to a particular means for achieving that, it invites us to focus on pedagogy”. The *Statement* clearly does that.

The discourse within the *Statement* could also be analysed in terms of the empirical, normative and conceptual elements of the policy (Haynes, 2002). The *Statement's* discourse provides evidence of empirical elements – it requires **all** Education Queensland School Communities to embrace Inclusive Education. The conceptual elements of the *Statement* are clearly evidenced where Inclusive Education is **defined** and indicators of effective learning and teaching recommended. However, overall the discourse can be seen as normative. The **values** of the reader, as they observe, implement and evaluate Inclusive Education in their community will greatly influence its success.

The hidden assumption of the *Statement* is that all members of the community hold the same values of inclusion as the policy makers and that the policy makers, the Government, will provide funding to support the policy. Many debates within the community surround this hidden assumption.

The *Inclusive Education Statement -2005* sub-title contains a quote from Professor Roger Slee -

Inclusive Education is for everybody and is everybody's business.

The use of Slee's provocative quote reflects the assumption that all key interests have the same values as the policy makers. Unfortunately, not all key interests believe they have a role to play or responsibility, skills to develop an Inclusive Education System.

Shaddock (2007) outlines parental arguments in the debate about Inclusive Education that include not enough government funding, lack of support for students, reduced self-esteem of students with disabilities and bullying in schools.

Adding to this debate is the standards agenda, high stakes testing and league tables. How schools cater for diverse student need and the perception that students with disabilities will have a negative effect on school performance, create tensions in schools (Katsiyannis et al, 2007; Voltz et al, 2008). Schools attempting to be inclusive and pushing for high student performance find themselves caught between seemingly opposing, disparate imperatives (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2007; Shaddock et al, 2005).

Teachers agree that there is a need for schools to be inclusive, however, they also present many reasons as to why this is hard to achieve. Arguments within the debate include anxiety because Teachers have not been trained or prepared to work with students with disabilities, lack of staff development in learning and teaching, frustration with school and departmental processes, including increased paperwork, lack of funding, human and material resources, lack of time for planning and

meetings, difficulties maintaining discipline and challenging all students (Lindsay, 2004; Horne and Timmons, 2007; Loeb et.al, 2008; Shaddock et.al, 2007). Tronc (2004, p.10) enters the debate about lack of resourcing and funding to support inclusion by describing this as “the greatest administrative failure in Australian education over the last four decades” .

The interplay between various policies and legislation has provided observers of Inclusive Education with much to debate. There is a challenge for schools to juggle the requirements of State Occupational Health and Safety Policies with the legislative requirements of the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act* when including students with aggressive behaviours. Shaddock (2007, p.17) adds further complexity to this debate by describing the lack of alignment between legal mandates and policy on one hand and the “beliefs, skills of teachers” on the other.

The responsibility for schools to assist the “shaping of society”, an expressed aim of the *Statement*, is seen by some commentators as “buck passing” by Governments (Fulcher, 1989, p.264) or that schools are “good sites for change” but they should not be expected to change the whole of society (Brady & Kennedy, 2003, p.32).

The *Statement* presents the importance of the Teachers’ involvement in the Inclusive Education Reform movement. The arguments presented by teachers about their skill levels, resourcing and funding could be seen as a hindrance to the implementation of the *Inclusive Education Statement*. There is overwhelming research that all effective classroom approaches, including Inclusive practices, rely heavily on the skills and attitudes of classroom teachers (Shaddock et.al, 2007; Fulcher, 1989; Lindsay, 2004; King- Sears, 2008). The *Statement* does not provide a response to the Teachers’ arguments.

The *Statement* itself does not specify any outcomes of its implementation. It claims that the aim of the *Statement* is to “sharpen” staff focus on the “equity and citizenship goals of public education” (2005, p.1). The subsequent *CRP-PR -009; Inclusive Education Policy* clarifies roles and responsibilities, though it also does not specify measureable outcomes or resource allocation to achieve its aims.

The “slip between hope and outcome is all too familiar” in policy according to Bridgman (2007, p.34). Further to this, the barriers to Inclusion resulting from lack of funding and resourcing probably supports Tronc’s (2004, p.40) “report card” of inclusiveness in the government school system as a “qualified ‘D’ tipping towards an ‘F’”.

Deal (1985) cited in Haynes (2002, p.92), provides us with a sense that outcomes of policy need not be specific and measurable and that policy-making, evaluation and research

...serve as important rituals, ceremonies or symbols. Their importance derives

from what is signalled, expressed, or represented rather than what is accomplished.

Perhaps the existence of the *Statement* is seen by the policy makers as symbolic and this is was the underlying strategy that they hoped would sustain the Inclusive Education Reform Agenda without increased resources.

Reference List

- Queensland State Government (2004). *The Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities)*. Brisbane Queensland: Queensland Government.
- Government, Q. (2005). Inclusive Education Statement - 2005. In E. Queensland (Ed.). Brisbane Queensland: Education Queensland.
- Government, Q. (2006). CRP-PR-009. In E. Queensland (Ed.). Brisbane Queensland: Queensland Government.
- Haynes, B. (2002). *Australian Education Policy* (2nd ed.). Katoomba NSW: Social Science Press.
- Horne, P. and Timmons, V. (2007). Making it Work: Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusion, *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (March to May 2008 ed., Vol. 10, pp. 1-14). London UK: Taylor and Francis.
- Katsiyannis, A. a. Z., D and Ryan, J and Jones, J. (2007). High Stakes Testing and Students With Disabilities, *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* (Winter ed., Vol. 18, pp. p160-167). Texas USA: Pro-Ed.
- King-Sears, M. (2008). Differentiation and the Curriculum Facts and Falacies: Differentiation and the General Curriculum for Students with Special Eductaional Needs, *Support for Learning* (Vol. 23, pp. 55- 62). Oxford UK: Blackwell.
- Lindsay, K. (2004). 'Asking for the Moon'? a Critical Assessment of Australian Disability Laws in Promoting Inclusion for Students with Disabilities, *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (Vol. 8, pp. 373-390).
- Shaddock, A. a. S. K., B and Giorcelli, L. (2007). A Project to Improve the Learning Outcomes of Students with Disabilities in the Early, Middle and Post COmpulsory Years of Schooling. Australian Government Department of Education (Ed.). Canberra: Australian Government.
- Tronc, D. K. (2004). Inclusion...the Dying Dream? *The Practising Administration*, 26(4), p10-13, 39-40.
- Voltz, D. a. S., M and Nelson, B and Bivens, C. (2008). Engineering Successful Inclusion in Standards-based Classrooms, *Middle School Journal* (Vol. 39, pp. 24).